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The Naturopathic Approach

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Abstract

That word 'approach' reflects an essential feature of Naturopathy — its philosophical attitude to the problems of life. It is no mere collection of empirical techniques, although like any practical system it had its beginnings in many fields of observation and in trial and error. Its theories are co-ordinated with facts in a consistent fashion which justifies its being called a method.

What this implies may be clarified by considering a person who has headache, and who consults a variety of individuals about his problem. The first might prescribe an analgesic, perhaps combined with an anti-depressant. Another could offer to sell him extracts from vegetable tissues, but essentially intended to have the same effects as the ethical prescription. Still other advisers would propose to make the sufferer unaware of his distress, by some form of mental exercise, suggestion or counter-irritant.

On principle, the Naturopath rejects all of these. All may work, but not by rectifying the causes. He has more affinity with the manipulator who, finding undue tensions or misalignments in the neck, by suitable adjustments diminishes strain and so gives relief. But Naturopathic philosophy demands that before applying even so apparently obvious a remedy one must ask the question 'why?'. Headache and neck tension may be due to various primary causes, more often a combination of several. Without seeking to discover at least something about these, one cannot give advice or treatment likely to be of more than transient benefit.

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THE NATUROPATHIC APPROACH

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It is more tragic than comic that many people believe that 'a disease is the sum of its symptoms'. This fallacy is profitably exploited in the sale of every kind of nostrum and in

encouraging many forms of symptom treatment. The Naturopath believes that any diseased organism is disordered *before* the appearance of signs or feelings of 'dis-ease'. Logically, true corrective treatment must be related to conditions which preceded the symptom. Even if these conditions no longer exist, they can at least be recognised, and reasoning about the patient's problem becomes possible.

In everyday terms, most illness is the result of the way most people live. A person who is properly nourished, well exercised, rewardingly employed, happy in his relationships and in an unpolluted environment has an excellent chance of good health. These factors alone cannot guarantee freedom from illness, because others may undermine his constitution. However, one can say with assurance that to the extent that the individual's existence is deficient in one or more of the items on that list, his chance of good health is diminished. Accordingly, we look to all these aspects and more.

Perhaps more important than any is an understanding of disease processes. We believe that disease is no accident; it always has rational causes, although one may have to seek far in time and space to find them. (By this we mean neither astrological mysticism nor the vilification of creatures and substances of microscopic or molecular smallness. Bacteria and viruses are interesting and complicating factors in many conditions, but are themselves influenced by pre-existing disorders.)

The Naturopath's immediate aim is to discover what guidance his patient requires in such routine matters as diet, exercise, occupational effects, emotional adjustment and the avoidance — as far as possible — of environ-

mental perils. Today, none of that sounds controversial, although it aroused bitter resentments little more than a generation ago.

However, orthodoxy still rejects our attitude to acute illnesses. These we regard as having not only logical causes but constructive purposes. That is, simple colds, fevers, rashes, sicknesses or diarrhoeas have eliminative or stress reducing significance. We see them as analogous with spring-cleanings in a household — a time of disturbed routine, of discomfort and commotion, yet with a wholesome purpose. A system which has its occasional spring-cleanings — as necessary to deal with accumulations of waste and to effect general readjustment — remains in good working order throughout a long and useful lifetime. But if these unpleasant yet useful processes are promptly arrested by symptomatic treatment, the system declines into a state of obstruction and impaired function. This is the situation in which chronic disease is most likely to develop.

We prefer to give our help to those still in good health, so that they may maintain it and realise their potentials. We have much to offer to young people and athletes; the beneficial effects of proper dietetics upon dentition, general development and muscular endurance are everyday instances. For people of any age, we, have a useful range of emergency aids from reduction of pelvic stress (often mis-called 'slipped disc') to treatment of injuries, wounds and burns. (For over 150 years, we and our predecessors have, with outstanding success, treated burns with cold water — a method only now beginning to be partially adopted in orthodox circles.)

And here it may be well to record that we place high valuation on surgery in more serious accident cases or in vital obstruction. Convalescence can be markedly assisted by Naturopathic routines, and in less-urgent circumstances we have often co-operated most successfully with surgeons, by promoting an improvement in the patient's tissues before operation, so that healing is rapid, neat and strong.

Those who have long been chronically ill, and who have suffered extensive degenerative changes, are likely to turn to Naturopathy as a last resort. Obliquely flattering though this may be, true cure in such cases is impossible — because some member, tissue or a part of a vital organ has already been destroyed. Nevertheless, that good, workable recoveries can sometimes be effected is an impressive testi-

mony to the tremendous self-healing powers of the human system — when unopposed and understood. These cases are also evidence of intelligence and determination on the part of the patient. And there should be no dubiety about this; Naturopathy is demanding on the patient. It calls not only for the effort of initiating routines of treatment (which gradually merge into daily habits) but also for the burden of individual responsibility.

We do not offer to 'cure' our patients. Our work is essentially educational, with the aim of enabling the patient to realise his own self-reparative and vital capacities. In the early stages we may have to assist by relieving physical stresses, to give guidance amounting at times to bullying or to ask the patient to do certain things on trust. But until we have explained reasons, and until the patient gains confidence in his own judgment, our work is incomplete.

We point to the cumulative menace of widespread and seemingly innocent customs — such as taking quantities of tea, coffee or soft drinks; all forms of smoking; the consumption of denatured foodstuffs; the use of 'simple remedies' for bowel sluggishness, stomach-ache or insomnia — and to the many other devitalising effects of civilised existence.

On the negative side, we must explain that our philosophy has no real place for such amusements as intestinal irrigation, expensive thermal baths, elixirs, vitamin concentrates and a whole catalogue of so-called 'health foods' (which often prove to be merely costly packages of wastes from food factories and pharmaceutical laboratories). Our methods do not involve the patient in the purchase of such services or merchandise. Our incomes do not come from profit or commission on sales of remedies, 'health foods' or gadgetry.

More positively, we can practise our skills in manipulative therapy, all the way from simple massage for relaxation to really strong corrections. Even here, we do not work mechanically, since each case must be individually assessed; dealing with the causes of a disorder is obviously more vital than giving immediate relief. In dietetics, we have practical information accumulated over three generations of systematic observation, and going far beyond the elementary matters of calories, amino-acids, vitamins and minerals. Through two centuries, experience of hydrotherapy supports our use of simple and effective water applications in particular circumstances.

We are familiar with the psychological

significance of certain symptoms and stresses. We are alert to the ways in which emotional strains may be intensified or diminished by altered physiological states, and how the reverse sequence can occur. Closely linked with these are problems of faulty posture—a broad field in which the patient's emotional background is as significant as his occupation.

Naturopathy is not, and makes no pretence to be, a substitute for medication. It cannot be produced in doses for specific ailments, and it is not primarily a resort for people when they are ill. It is a way of looking at life, and applying reasoned interpretation to what is observed, so that those who accept and practise its philosophy can give their systems a better chance of maintaining normal function, or of regaining it. As with any worthwhile way of life, it is not merely for the Sabbath but for every day.

Our first, fairly lengthy, interview with a patient may be mainly devoted to examination of physical indications of disorder, but often it is obvious that psychological strains are of

greater account. Sometimes, we believe we identify the major factors promptly; in cases it takes time to establish communication—perhaps after a considerable interval for contemplation. What we suggest as remedial depends more upon what we recognise as basic causes than upon specific symptoms. Further, we cannot truly apply our methods to a reluctant patient; there must be willingness to understand and to make a personal effort. The patient does not 'submit to a cure'; he effects it himself, with our guidance.

To make this easier, we have residences where such material considerations as diet are provided for, and where it is convenient to give instruction and physical treatment. But this is only a temporary phase; an introduction to and preparation for the life-long acceptance of Naturopathic philosophy and practice. Although a patients' education there may be intensive, only a small part of his recovery usually takes place in such establishments; his real cure is a continuing process, conducted and carried out by his own physical, ethical and mental resources.

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